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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses methodological and theoretical concerns of sociologists and art historians and proposes issues for an interdisciplinary social study of art which draw from both disciplines. The social nature of art is interpreted as including art's contribution to society and social change, its position as an expression of social realities, and its role as a socialization mechanism by which people learn about their world. Four basic processes determine the functions of art in society: the production of works of art, their exposure, their evaluation and selection, and the distribution of rewards to their creators. Review of the literature dealing with theoretical concerns of sociologists of art and art historians indicates that whereas sociologists have traditionally been concerned with the social world in which art is created and disseminated, art historians have generally dealt with formal stylistic characteristics of works of art separately from their social context. In spite of this diversity of theoretical concerns, and the resulting separate and independent methodologies of each discipline, there are major issues of interest to both historians and sociologists of art, including: (1) development of artistic traditions, (2) social response to works of art, and (3) works of art which have survived beyond the time and sociocultural context of their origin. The conclusion is that collaboration between historians and sociologists of art is imperative if research on the social aspects of art is to exhibit both a historical perspective and a social organization perspective. (Author/DB)

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THE SOCIAL STUDY OF ART - TOWARD AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PURSUIT

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Introduction: Theoretical Concerns

Art has often been seen as a mode of individual expression (Read, 1966; Deinhard, 1970) which, among other things, has been recognized as an intellectual interpretation and manifestation of psychosocial experiences that are both or either:

a. those of the individual creator(s), and thus mirror the artist's psychological and social world (Coser, 1972; Laurenson and Swingewood, 1972), and

b. those shared by the creator and other individuals who live in a similar social context, and thus mirror a collective experience, a reflection of what Ziman (1968) called "public knowledge" and what Wölfflin (1929) referred to as the conceptual framework of an epoch, a race, a society.

The disciplines that study art from these perspectives each adhere to different cognitive frameworks and consequently employ different methods of research and analysis. Thus, each leaves out something from a holistic approach. Art history is concerned with the stylistic elements through which individual and collective conceptual frameworks have been manifested. It proceeds to search for comparable stylistic categories and to identify artistic forms or symbols which tend to prevail and remain more or less constant over a period of time (Frankl, 1968; Ackerman, 1963). The sociology of art, on the other hand, proceeds to analyze the social world in which art is created and disseminated. It is concerned with both conceptual frameworks (knowledge, value orientations, ideologies, world views, and so on) and with the structural context of the social world in an attempt to find the intellectual, material, and social constructions that correspond to particular stylistic manifestations. To follow such a pursuit the sociologist of art

must possess knowledge that pertains to the stylistic elements and the array of artistic expressions that appear in human society in any collective and period he/she may choose to study. Such a knowledge is obtainable from the works of both art and intellectual historians.

Similarly, since the historian of art is concerned with analyzing stylistic manifestations and developments, under the often vague and unspecified assumption that a society, as much as the individual creators, is responsible for the creation of works of art (Read, 1966), it is imperative that he/she has adequate knowledge of that society and its normative and structural frameworks. This is where sociology--in the shape of the sociology of knowledge, which studies conceptual frameworks and their relationships to social structure, and institutional sociology, which studies the social institution of art--can step in to assist the art historian.

Though the scholars of the two disciplines can use each other's data without actually collaborating in their construction and analysis, the final product may be lacking on several accounts. The sociologist could misinterpret the highly personalized evaluative analysis of the art historian; while the art historian may not possess the methodological tools and perspective to apply sociological data to his/her evaluative analysis. Since the art historian is rarely engaged in a systematic research of artistic career patterns, patronage systems, or intellectual frameworks, his/her data about stylistic characteristics could say very little about the relevant social context in which art is produced and disseminated, and could provide but a sketchy data source for a comparative sociological analysis. On the other hand, the sociological notion that the social context of artistic creation acts to constrain and direct the production of art may be totally rejected by the art historian, who believes in ultimate aesthetic qualities (see

Sclafani's 1973 and Morton's 1973 reviews of Dickie, 1971). The enforced dependence of the sociologist who is not trained as an art historian on a diversity of art-historical material most of which has been assembled according to a variety of criteria represents another constraint on the comparability and subsequently the validity of the historical data for meaningful sociological analysis. The sociologist often tends to lump together works of art which appear at a certain period or in a particular society, and to end up with sociological generalizations (Kavolis, 1968) which may be alien and unacceptable to the art historian, who is interested in the single work of art or the oeuvre of an individual artist.

Methodological Concerns

Because of the diversity of art-related theoretical concerns, the disciplines of art history, the sociology of knowledge, and institutional sociology have each developed their own, independent methodologies.

Art history, which does not, for the most part, question the sociocultural context in which works of art are produced and disseminated, concentrates on the documentation of the genesis of works of art--when they were created, by whom, for whom, and by what artistic means. Such documentation involves the definition and analysis of styles, the relative impact of works/styles or other works or styles, and the analysis of the single work or the oeuvre of individual artists. The depiction of sociocultural frameworks and of the social organization of art, if it is done at all, is for the most part accomplished in a descriptive, nonanalytic manner.[1]

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[1]This is not to say that art historians have not been concerned with social factors and the work of Arnold Hauser, Kenneth Clark and Herbert Read are prime examples. The point made here is that most of the art historical material has not dealt with such factors sufficiently or systematically.

The sociology of knowledge is interested in the cognitions, value orientations, and ideologies that exist in different social structures, and concentrates on the analysis of epistemological manifestations portrayed in works of art. It often assumes a totality of culture or world views in order to define the social units (classes, ethnic groups, etc.) that correspond to such views (see Wolff, 1975). Though hermeneutic philosophy developed the theoretical justification for the need to define such social units, the concept of cultural totality is at best vague and ambiguous. The complexity of human society, especially contemporary society, does not allow such an assumption, nor, in fact, does one need to make it. The audiences for works of art are amorphous entities. They tend to be open to a variety of art forms, and different audiences may well be exposed to different forms. In addition, although value orientations are instrumental to the explanation of artistic expressions and the history of the reception accorded certain works of art, such orientations cannot be taken as a fully common property of any social group, much less of a whole society, period, or civilization.

Institutional sociology, for its part, considers art as a social institution and concentrates on studying art-related roles and statuses and their interrelationships. The functions of art as an expressive endeavor are analyzed in terms of the interrelationships between art and other social institutions. The methodology involved focuses on typologies of roles and correlational associations among factors that pertain to the social characteristics of these roles.

The two sociological approaches discuss the social circumstances of the genesis of works of art, the social circumstances of the reception of works of art, and the social origins and development of styles. Both analyze the impacts that institutional and ideological frameworks have had on the

structure of art as a social institution/organization, and the organizational matrix of art as an institution. However, while the sociology of knowledge discusses cognitions from a philosophical perspective and its sociological categories lead to nonempirical research, institutional sociology employs empirical sociological concepts and its line of research conforms to hypothesis-testing manipulations, often at the cost of ignoring any social cognitions for which empirical measures are not fully developed. Though they are not incompatible, the two sociological methodologies have been traditionally separated.

The preceding discussion does not mean to imply that these theoretical and methodological differences cannot be overcome. Given these disciplines' interrelated conception of art as a human expression embedded in a sociocognitive context, they may well be seeking answers to similar questions. Such an endeavor, however, will necessitate major collaborative efforts on the part of each discipline's scholars if problems of misinterpretation, inapplicability, unreliability, and invalidity of data are to be avoided. There is a great need, therefore, to formulate an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework that can be shared by both art historians and sociologists. Such a framework, as discussed in this paper, pertains to the social nature of art and prescribes central issues and the line of research which will underlie a collaborative effort between art historians and sociologists of art. It is maintained here that the study of the social organization of art and its relationship to other normative and structural aspects of society is the thrust of an <u>interdisciplinary</u> social study of art. Since such study must rely on the data and perspectives of all three of the approaches discussed above, it necessitates their collaboration under a unified theoretical and methodological framework.

The Social Nature of Art

Art cannot become a subject for sociological analysis unless some assumptions pertaining to its "ties" to society or to the collective are laid out. Such analysis is also beneficial to the art historian who investigates the social context of artistic production and dissemination.

The earliest concerns with the social nature of art were with its social functions (Mukerjee, 1959; Hauser, 1951; Sorokin, 1937; and many others). The term function was used to connote

a. the social determinants of art (styles and media) among which intellectual traditions and technological developments gained the most attention (Sorokin, 1937; Hauser, 1951; Kavolis, 1960, 1972; Duvignaud, 1967; Deinhard, 1970, 1975; Gràna, 1971; Laurenson and Swingewood, 1972), and

b. the social consequences of art, its contributions to human society and social change (the Durkheimian and Parsonsian approaches; Duvignaud, 1967; Kavolis, 1972; Marcuse, 1972).

Thus the social nature of art is defined to be an expression of social, (material, and nonmaterial) realities and their effects on the cognitive and behavioral aspects of human collectivities. Though both "functional" conceptions of art imply the existence of processes of artistic production and dissemination which are affected by and interact with other social institutions, little has been said save in the Marxist literature on art, about these processes' particular associations (causal, correlational, and the like) with the social realities and institutions that, presumably, both affect and are affected by works of art.

The necessity of establishing such a relationship stems from the fact that neither the production nor the reception (or dissemination) of art works

are based solely on the psychic energies of the creators and their audiences, which determine their ability to create and receive art. The history of art provides us with a wide panorama of complex interactive frameworks in which the production and the reception of art have always been products of specific organizational networks set up to define and regulate what is to be produced, accepted, or rejected, and in what fashion (see Albrecht et al., 1970; Becker, 1974). The social functions of art cannot be understood unless we specify the structural mechanisms which are instrumental in the implementation of such functions, under the assumption that such implementations are socially regulated processes and that they relate directly to the social organization of art.

Let me elaborate on this point. The basic view that art, as a form of knowledge, expresses both individual and collective worlds rests on the assumption that the production of art is bound by time and space, and that some of its symbolic elements are shared by certain individuals or groups in society.

To the extent that artistic expressions reflect particular, time-bound systems of knowledge, such as ideas about truth, beauty, morality, and concepts of nature, God, and social relationships (see Tolstoy, 1960; Collingwood, 1964; and H. Rosenberg, 1972), and to the extent that these ideas and concepts are not unique to the creator but are shared by other people, either at the time of the creation of the art works or at any time thereafter, art can be seen as:

a. a socialization mechanism by which people can learn about their world and which regulates the integration of social groups, aiming at the reinforcement of those ideas and concepts that are manifest in the works, and

b. (a corollary of a.) a mechanism of social control which creates and regulates collective knowledge and reinforces the social structure in which works of art are created and received (Lang and Williams, 1972; Vázquez, 1973).

To understand the working of the determinants and the consequences of art, therefore, we will have to establish the cognitive meaning of art (art being a genre of human activity) and the ways and means by which such activity is organized and utilized for certain collective functions such as those mentioned above.

It follows, then, that art's ties to society lie in the very fact that its production and its reception are socially regulated activities, and that the history of art is a social history. Furthermore, one cannot divorce the formal characteristics of art from its social determinants and subsequent social effects. This is so not only because art is created and disseminated within social contexts but also because its determinants and effects are, to some extent, consciously manipulated and organized processes controlled by individuals, groups and organizations which are in a position to support the production of art. In other words, the formal characteristics of art are affected by the demands and the artistic, social and political interests of those who support its production.

The reasons why the formal characteristics of works of art have been dealt with separately from the social context of their production and dissemination have to do more with disciplinary specialization (specialized theoretical and methodological frameworks) between the sociology of art and art history than with art historians' rejection of the presumption of the social nature of art and its institutional aspects (see, for example, Goodwin's comments on "Artology," 1975 and Dickie, 1971).

Art historians have traditionally treated art through its objectified manifestations only. The social nature of art, namely, art's relation to its institutional and cognitive framework, has been accepted by art historians as a given, but not as a concept open to systematic questioning and probing.

Art historians and philosophers of art have always been primarily concerned with what constitutes art, its particular elements and their interrelationships. Though there seems to be a notion that beauty exists in the eyes of the beholder (Clive Bell's [1913] discussion on taste and the perception of the significant form is particularly compelling), generations of intellectuals have struggled to conceptualize the elements of human expressions that they defined as art (see Tolstoy, 1960, for a comprehensive summary on the subject). Wölfflin's (1929) and Frankl's (1968) discussions on the traditions of expressive manifestations shed light on the fact that each epoch, society, race, or region, however defined, has had some notion of what constituted artistic expression and its meaning, and what expressions were acceptable. None of these sources, however, have questioned the development of the concept of art and the acceptability of its expressive manifestations, nor have they questioned the universality of the definition of art. Questioning the processes by which art is defined has not been within the "paradigmatic" scheme of art history (see Ackerman, 1963).

The history of art patronage indicates that works of art have always been commissioned, though more frequently in the past than at present, and that their content and their expressive characteristics as well as their formative elements have, to one degree or another, been stipulated (Kenning, 1970). Stylistic developments and the establishment of artistic traditions were never divorced from the demands by certain groups (such as the aristocracy or the emerging middle class during the Renaissance) for certain

artistic products (Hauser, 1951; Ben-David, 1971; White and White, 1965). The ability of patrons to support the artist and to finance the creation of works of art, and their access to the means of dissemination and reception of such works have always been crucial in determining what is produced, how the artistic stature of works of art is defined, and what, ultimately, is the reception accorded to such works. In other words, if the sociologist is led to study the social determinants of works of art in terms of their meaning for both their creators and their audiences (Deinhard, 1970, 1975; Wolff, 1975), and to use cognitive frameworks to explain the reception of works of art, he/she must also study the organizational means by which that reception is carried out. The creation and reception of art cannot be explained without our gaining a critical understanding of the processes by which art is socially defined and regulated, and thus serves to integrate social collectives, reinforce particular social order, and maintain collective knowledge.

As was said earlier, the attribution of social functions to art necessitates a presupposition of more or less organized activities, carried out by either individuals, groups, or organizations, which result in the implementation of these functions. These activities are organized around four basic processes: the production of works of art, their exposure, their evaluation and selection, and the distribution of rewards to their creators. These processes are carried out by social units which differ from each other in terms of their cognitive orientations, their political and economic status, their control over the means by which art is produced and disseminated, and their ability to reward artists. When art is perceived as a form of knowledge that can be created and disseminated to serve these functions, the historiography of works of art can be seen as manipulated by social units in accordance with those units' cognitive frame of references, their sociopolitical interests, and their

relative control over the resources necessary to maintain artistic production and reception. Thus, the understanding of stylistic developments, emergence and maintenance of artistic traditions, and the role played by art in society can be gained by observing how the creation and the reception of works of art are organized in society and how such an organization, which is referred to here as the social organization of art, is interrelated with other normative and institutional aspects of society.

Interdisciplinary Concerns

Under the premises that art is socially defined and socially regulated and that the essence of the history of art is social in nature, several issues of interest to both historians of art and sociologists of art emerge.[2] All deal with the ways by which artistic traditions emerge and crystallize and the normative and structural factors which establish and maintain the supremacy of some traditions over others.

The first issue involves the inquiry into the development of artistic traditions as they are manifested by styles and their formative, contextual and technological elements. Such an inquiry will have to question:

a. how adequately expressive manifestations reflect the cognitions ("world views," etc.) existing in the social units that correspond to these expressions; and

b. what are the interrelationships between individuals and groups which determine what art is created and what art is accepted, and by whom.

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[2] I am indebted to Professor Etzkorn (1977) for his helpful suggestions of additional appropriate concerns. However, these pertain to the relationship of stylistic characteristics and societal structure and will have to be dealt within different, though not contradictory, theoretical framework. Therefore I chose not to include them in the present discussion.

While the first question is of greater concern to sociologists of knowledge who are interested in art as a form of knowledge, the second question is of interest to institutional sociologists studying art as a social institution. The solution to both questions involves a collaboration with art historians who are equipped to provide the sociologist with insights into the formal characteristics of works of art/styles, and with intellectual historians who can analyze the meanings of works of art as they pertain to both their creators and their audiences.

Among those who work within the framework of the sociology of knowledge, Deinhard (1970, 1975) and Wolff (1975) insist that the genesis of works of art, their reception history, and the role that art plays in society can all be explained by the value orientations, Zeitgeist, of the time of the creation of the works of art and those of their audiences at any time thereafter.

Presupposing value orientations to be determinants of the historiography of works of art carries with it either the implicit conception of a unified, shared system of values, i.e., a Zeitgeist, or the conception of some dominant value orientations not necessarily shared by all, but which have had a major impact on the creation and reception of works of art. While the first conception is difficult to assess or operationalize (and is probably erroneous), the second suggests that the societal structure determines the dominance of certain value orientations and that it is this structure on which the social study of art ought to concentrate.

If, as I believe is indeed the case, one finds a number of general cognitive orientations in any society that are shared by social groups which differ from each other by racial, cultural, or class distinctions, those cognitions which find their way into artistic products must be identified in terms of the social units to which they correspond. Because different

cognitive systems (value orientations, world views, ideologies, and the like) are in conflict with each other, indeed, are competing with each other for some form of supremacy, those works that are defined as art and therefore presumably consist of acceptable artistic expressions have to be analyzed as such, i.e., as expressing those cognitions that have gained supremacy while others remain repressed, nondominant, or altogether unexpressed. The social positions and characteristics of the people who hold such cognitions, since they originally determined and continue to maintain the relative status (of dominance) of the cognitions, are additional factors which have to be considered when we come to study the correspondence between cognitive systems and artistic expressions. Artistic traditions, then, are created by social units and the ultimate survival of such traditions depends on the course of the interrelationships between the social units that create them.

Unlike the historian of art, the sociologist questions the social response to works of art. He/she is interested in stylistic manifestations and changes insofar as they generate the social response which determines whether the works of art are accepted or rejected. The organization of such social response is a second issue worthy of attention from both art historians and sociologists of art.

Even if we accept the premise that artists' creations are determined by the artists' cognitive frame of mind, which itself is affected by the artist's social, political, religious, economic, and existential frameworks, the fact that certain works of art have gained wider reception than others (at the time they were created and at later periods and in different sociocultural contexts) does not tell us enough about social responses and their organization to satisfactorily explain why some works have survived and others have passed into oblivion. Unless we are willing to accept the existence of some general

agreement in regard to the quality of works of art, a dubious assumption by itself, we have to study the reception history of art works in terms of the social response they have generated and the individuals and other social units such as classes, ethnic groups, professional organizations, and so on, who have been involved in their reception.

The notion that each work of art displays its creator's interpretation of, emotional involvement with, and attitudes toward his/her social, cultural, economic, religious, and political context is legitimate for those who study the processes by which human cognitions are formed and the artistic traditions that determine the ways and means by which such cognitions are expressed. However, these traditions are by themselves a form of social response--the acceptance and to some extent the institutionalization of particular manifestations of cognitions. The ways in which responses are generated by individuals, groups, or organizations, and are manifested in forms of social action such as commissioning works, setting up shows, curating museums (exposing art), evaluating works of art and their selection, buying and selling works of art, and so on, are an integral part of the sociohistorical study of art. The sociologist is concerned with any sociopolitical interests, economic status shifts, or religious and ethnic origins that may give rise to or inhibit audiences' responses (and such responses are always there), and promote or inhibit their transformation into social action. The response, as determined by its Zeitgeist, is only one route by which to study the reception of art. The effectiveness of such value orientations, i.e., whether they are translated into social action and underline the social organization of art I referred to earlier, becomes a central, meaningful concern of any social study of art.

Because social factors (such as class structure, or artistic traditions)

lead to artistic creations, and these in return stimulate social responses, it is also necessary to study the epistemological elements and behavioral aspects of responses to works of art. This will unveil the forces which take part in the historical odyssey of artistic styles and productions.

What I am leading to is the possibility that works of art are accepted or rejected for reasons other than value orientations or intrinsic quality. If art historians do not devote time to past works which were not accepted at any point in history, is it because they are deliberately ignoring these works on account of their lesser quality and inferior aesthetic characteristics, or is it because such works have not been known to them? Is it possible that there were other factors which determined the rejection of these works, and that the result was to plunge them permanently into oblivion?

The sociologist, if such works or their creators could be assembled for his/her investigation (and here the contribution of the art historian is of utmost importance), would have to look for those factors which can explain the rejection of such works in comparison to others that were accepted. Assuming that both types of work may have affected some stylistic developments, their mutual destinies may have been determined by contemporaneous value orientations, but each was probably accepted by different interest groups. Hence, the survival of the works often depends on the relative social and economic power of the groups who are responsive to them and not exclusively on the qualities inherent in the works themselves.

A third issue of interdisciplinary interest is the survival of works of art that have come to be defined as "great art," beyond the time and sociocultural context of their origin. Their status (at least in the Western Hemisphere) as great works of art, for the greater part of their history, has not been shaken (though there are cases such as Gainsborough's

works or Western art's status in the U.S.S.R. in which the "greatness" of certain works has been challenged). If they still have particular meanings for us, similar or dissimilar to those meanings they had for audiences in other periods and societies, if those who control the means of exposing and evaluating art are still promoting the superior status of such works, then it is appropriate to ask whether such works embody characteristics (formal and stylistic) that transcend time and space and have meanings which are shared by human beings wherever they are and at whatever time. Such characteristics are often referred to as those which embody the universality of mankind (Vázquez, 1973; Laurenson and Swingewood, 1972) or those that institute significant forms and are capable of evoking in audiences an aesthetic experience that supersedes any other emotional experience involving artistic products (Bell, 1913). Psychologists of art (Krietler and Krietler, 1972) refer to the catharsis processes created by exposure to great works of art.

The analysis of such characteristics is obviously the domain of the art historian, the art critic, and the philosopher of art. However, the phenomenon of labeling certain works of art as great and others as not great raises other questions that pertain to the traditions [and their continuity] that establish and maintain the supremacy of the qualities that characterize great works of art, and to the continuity in patterns of control over means of reception of art which maintain the normative and structural mechanisms that actively support these traditions.

This is to say that what legitimizes the status of great works is the structurally maintained perception that such works encompass a notion of humanity which people in different times and locations can share. This perception is, by itself, a socially constructed cognition. Art perception

is a product of traditions and conventions, stemming from a particular sociocognitive structure and technological development. We can expect that as long as those who control the resources for the production and reception of art hold on to those artistic traditions and conventions on the basis of which great works of art have been defined as such, these works' status as great works of art will remain in tact.

This approach frees the sociologist to assume a dialectical relationship among competing social groups (in terms of their value orientations and other sociopolitical interests) and makes possible the investigation of relationships between these groups in an attempt to find out the social processes by which the artistic stature of works of art is defined. Furthermore, it liberates the sociologist from the necessity of defining the meaning of aesthetic quality, although he/she will need to identify the social units to which various identifiable definitions of aesthetic quality apply. The very fact that aesthetic standards of quality themselves change (as reflected in the works of art historians, critics, and philosophers) serves well to indicate the relativity of artistic quality and the necessity of understanding the social processes by which such standards form and are changed. For example, some works of art currently defined as "great" were, at the time of their origin, refused exposure or denounced as "not being art" (the Impressionists' work, Picasso's first cubist painting, Van Gogh's and Millet's works, Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, and so on). The definition of art as it has been changing throughout history usually changes in the direction of including additional artistic expressions. Such changes correspond to changes in the social organization of art whereby new means of exposure have been set up, either by artists or by audiences who previously did not have access to the existing means of exposure or, alternatively,

have expanded the variety of art they are willing to accept for economic, political, and ideological reasons. Thus Eskimo and American Indian art was redefined as art once influential art collectors such as the Rockefeller family became interested in it. Community art projects began to receive financial support once the notion of ethnic culture gained recognition, presumably for "political acquiescence" reasons. Pop music gained recognition because of the massive response to it by young people and the tremendous economic opportunities promised, in consequence, by the marketing of such music.[3] On the other hand, the examples of Nazi Germany, the Soviet regime after 1922, and the cultural revolution in China in denouncing certain types of art--which by themselves serve as examples of the manipulation of collective knowledge by rearranging the available means of artistic production and reception--suggest that the definition of art is regulated on the basis of criteria that often have little to do with artistic or stylistic qualities. Works of art which are defined as "great" or as "masterpieces" in one sociocultural context may be denied such status under another, not just because the "significant form" may be perceived differently in different sociocultural environments, but also because the social organization of art is set up in a way that denies certain media and styles the opportunity to receive appropriate audience exposure and response. The status of greatness is bestowed upon a work of art once an appropriate social response has been generated by it. Although no social response to art can be fully

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[3]Conjunctly, a relationship between certain developments of artistic forms and media and developments of new means of exposure and/or the emergence of art audiences who differ in their art consumption patterns from already existing audiences can be discerned. For example the emergence of the symphonic music (and the symphonic orchestra) as a result of the changing nature of music audiences to whom the small and exclusive drawing rooms of the aristocracy were inaccessible.

generated, because works are usually selectively exposed to the audiences, when the receiving audiences enjoy no social prestige or lack the resources to support the art they like, such art is less likely to gain high status, regardless of its quality than art supported by more prestigious groups.

Summary and Conclusion

The issues this paper proposed for an interdisciplinary social study of art are based on two basic premises:

a. The history of art is a social history since it involves collective behavior. In Durkheimian terms, art is a social fact.

b. Art, as a form of knowledge, is socially defined (constructed) and its production and reception are socially regulated.

Because of this, the social study of art as an interdisciplinary effort must concentrate on the study of the social organization of art since this organization has direct bearing on the individuals and groups in given sociocultural contexts whose access to social, political, and economic means determines both the extent to which and the ways in which they can effectively define and regulate the creation and the reception of works of art.

Such an approach questions the extent to which value orientations are shared by all members of a society, or other defined groups, in a given sociocultural context; it also determines the relative access of holders of competing value orientations to the processes of production, exposure, evaluation, selection, and reward distribution in art. Audiences' responses to works of art, which are related to the formal and expressive elements in works of art and are shaped by their cognitions and social positions, are the social force behind artistic traditions, the genesis both of works of art and of the reception history of these works.

Because audience responses materialize in organized social action by which art is produced and disseminated, the social study of art necessitates an inquiry into the normative and structural aspects of this social action. The social units involved in the production and reception of art, their boundaries and social characteristics, can be defined in terms of identifiable forms of social action and the people involved in organizing it. Artists who participate in shows, performances, and other events; foundations which finance artistic production; art critics; gallery dealers; the public which attends shows and performances; art schools' staff and faculty; and so on.

It is clear that the assumption that the production and the reception of art are socially defined and regulated pertains to all categories of art, from the individual work to the oeuvre of a single artist, and also to media, styles, and "schools" of art. The difficulty of suiting empirical and epistemological sociology to oeuvre-oriented art history may very well be resolved provided the questions historians and sociologists of art choose to study are formulated on the basis of the premises just mentioned. The sociologist is equipped with the necessary tools to operationalize the sociological categories under study. Much of the factual data concerning works of art, their material and symbolic characteristics, and the social and structural description of the organization of the art world will have to be supplied by the art historian. It will have to be gathered, however, under the imperatives of the theoretical premises shared by both the historian and the sociologist of art and of the research questions generated by those premises. This action will have the dual benefits of making the art historian's work more relevant to the sociologist and of strengthening the validity of sociological arguments and generalized conclusions.

Historians and sociclogists of art must accomplish different but interdependent tasks. Viewed in light of the need to explore the stylistic (formative and cognitive) aspects of art from both a historical perspective and that of the social organization of art, teamwork between historians and sociologists of art becomes more than a possibility; it is imperative.

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